



RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

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Have applicable restrictions or requirements imposed by the ROE been complied with prior to striking a target? The ROE are directives issued by competent military authority to delineate the circumstances and limitations under which air, ground, and naval forces may initiate and/or continue combat engagement with other forces encountered. *Essentially, ROE are rules for a particular operation that govern the use of force to reflect the will of the civilian and military leadership.* ROE constrain the actions of US military forces to ensure their actions are consistent with domestic and international law, national policy, and objectives. Although ROE are not law, they are authoritative restrictions issued at the appropriate level of command to control the use of force. ROE are based upon domestic and international law, history, strategy, political concerns, and a vast wealth of operational wisdom, experience, and knowledge provided by military commanders and operators. ROE may be more *restrictive* than the LOW for a given situation, but they can't be more *permissive* than allowed under LOW—therefore compliance with ROE should guarantee compliance with LOW.

Personnel involved in targeting should be involved in the development and refinement of ROE along with the judge advocates. Just as tasking and targeting are cyclical, so too is ROE development, and it may require constant input and refinement in order to meet operational requirements.

What is contained in ROE? There is usually information in the ROE that is directly applicable to how, when or under what circumstances targets may be struck. The ROE may contain such information as target approval authorities for certain types or classes of targets (economic objects, lines of communication), and approval authority for time-sensitive or high-collateral damage targets. It may also contain information regarding what weapons may be used (like cluster bombs or anti-personnel mines), the conditions for use, and approval authority for their use.

Where are ROE found? ROE may be found in the [standing rules of engagement](#) (SROE), a [combatant commander](#) (CCDR)'s theater-specific ROE, and ROE issued specifically for an operation (such as with Operations ENDURING FREEDOM, IRAQI FREEDOM, INHERENT RESOLVE, and FREEDOM'S SENTINEL).

Standing Rules of Engagement (SROE). These are contained in a classified CJCS Instruction. The SROE provide implementation guidance on the inherent right of self-defense and the application of force for mission accomplishment. The SROE also provide a framework for the development and implementation of ROE across the [range of military operations](#). The important point to remember is that the SROE are not tailored to specific military operations. They provide guidance in the absence of operation-specific ROE, and do not contain specific targeting restrictions or considerations based on the circumstances of a particular operation.

Theater-Specific Rules of Engagement. These are the CDR's theater-specific ROE. These ROE address specific strategic and political sensitivities of the AOR, and should be approved by the CJCS. Theater-specific ROE may have been issued in a separate message. Like the SROE, these may not provide specific targeting restrictions or considerations based on ongoing operational constraints.

Operation-Specific ROE. These ROE are promulgated by the President, Secretary of Defense, CDR, and component commanders and are based upon the specific factors underlying the operation. The ROE might be sent to the components via message from the CDR or could be incorporated into the [operations order](#) (OPORD). *The ROE are usually re-stated in the [joint air operations plan](#) (JAOP) and in Section Five of the air component's daily [special instructions](#) (SPINS).*

ROE and Modern Warfare

One example of the complexity of ROEs and modern warfare has been the US armed conflict with ISIL. In this case, a non-State actor, ISIL, has controlled significant territory and multiple State and non-State actors have been engaging in military operations against ISIL, other groups, and each other for several years. These complex operations require different sets of ROEs for each mission or operation, and in some cases a NATO and US theater ROE may be in effect for the same AOR. Air Force operators are responsible for ensuring that they understand which theater- or mission-specific ROE apply and who has the authority to authorize a strike on a target. The multitude of State and non-State actors, high operations tempo, urban environment, and multiple combat operations occurring simultaneously presents a complex operating environment.

[Annex 1-04, Legal Support, ROE Chapter](#). This chapter provides guidance in how to develop ROE. Considerations discussed include: ROE development is a collaborative effort (vertical and horizontal among organizations); ROE development should integrate all players (JAG, commanders, planners, and operators); ROE should not be too specific or restrictive; and ROE need to provide simple, clear guidance to accomplish the mission. **“ROE-like” Restrictions Impacting Targeting**

Are there any other restrictions that may impact targeting? Restrictions that are not formally issued as ROE may exist in other documents. In theory, these would be explicitly incorporated in the ROE or at least incorporated by reference. In practice, this is not always the case. As such, it is imperative that all personnel involved in targeting work—operators, planners and judge advocates—ensure they are aware of ***all*** applicable targeting restrictions regardless of how these restrictions are characterized or issued. Some examples are listed below.

Target Lists. The NSL, [restricted target list](#) (RTL), and [joint target list](#) (JTL) are compiled and maintained by the combatant command. An NSL may contain those facilities and structures that are protected under LOW (churches, hospitals, etc.). The RTL contains facilities and structures for which approval, in some cases, must first be obtained from the establishing authority before affecting. These facilities are on the RTL because there is some function or valid military reason that mitigates against a strike. Targets on the JTL may also contain restrictions in the target folders. Although a target itself may be approved for strike and placed on the JTL, its target folder may restrict specific [joint desired point of impact](#) (JDPI)s from being struck or restrict the size or type of munitions that may be used against the target or some of its JDPIs. For example, if a target is near a sensitive site, such as a school, the JDPIs closest to the school may be restricted entirely or restricted to only certain types of weapons.

Collateral Damage Methodology (CDM). Historically, various combatant commands have conducted CDM according to their own standards. JCS directives now delineate a coherent five-step process that standardizes DOD CDM practices.

The JAOP, cyber operations plan (CyOP), and joint space operations plan (JSOP). Many restrictions from the combatant commander, [joint force commander](#) (JFC), USCYBERCOM, JFCC-Space, and the [commander, Air Force forces](#) (COMAFFOR) may be found in sections of the JAOP, CyOP, and JSOP that set forth standing orders and commander's intent.

Special Instructions (SPINs). SPINs are periodically issued by the [air operations center](#) (AOC) and usually have several sections that may contain ROE. Most SPINs have a subsection specifically called "ROE" that may contain ROE changes until a new version or regular changes to the OPORD can be published. This section may also contain any amplification the COMAFFOR deems necessary for complex ROE provisions.

Fragmentary Orders (FRAGO). In some past operations, restrictions from the CDR impacting targeting were also published in FRAGOs.

Fire Support Annex. The fire support annex to an OPORD may also contain additional guidance or information concerning targeting.

Coalition Concerns. [Coalition](#) forces may have their own set of ROE that may not be similar to US ROE. That may impact whether coalition forces have the authority to strike certain sensitive targets such as leadership, [weapons of mass destruction](#) (WMD), etc. or the type of support they are able to provide to US forces striking those targets. US

forces operating from coalition bases (e.g., Diego Garcia) may also have restrictions placed on them—and on the targeting they execute—by coalition ROE as well. Close coordination is required with coalition partners during targeting to facilitate the understanding of their ROE and the limits it may impose on them.
